



All time high for Goldfinch

Goldfinches are feeding in more of our gardens than ever before. The latest results from the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch survey show that Goldfinches are now being reported from 55% of all gardens surveyed. This is up from 23% in 1995, when the study began. Why the big increase?

Goldfinches are specialist feeders. They feed on the small seeds of plants, such as dandelions and ragwort, and with their long slender bills, they are the only finch species able to extract seeds from teasels. During the early winter these seeds become harder to find, and results show that this is when Goldfinches begin to appear in our gardens. But why are they doing this in ever increasing numbers?

Paul Stancliffe, Promotions Officer at the British Trust for Ornithology said, *“Over the last ten years the wild bird food suppliers have been developing an increasingly wide variety of seed mixes and specialist foods, and Goldfinches have been quick to take advantage of these. Sunflower hearts and nyjer seed are particularly favoured. So now when seeds in the countryside become scarce Goldfinches are able to exploit garden feeding stations. This just wasn’t possible before these new seed mixes became available.”*

During 2006, BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatchers revealed that Goldfinches were coming to gardens at the highest levels since the survey began in 1995. Formerly on the Amber List of Conservation Concern, Goldfinch has been downgraded to the green list, reflecting that it is now doing much better, something which may be linked to its increasing use of gardens for winter-feeding.

If you want to attract Goldfinches to your garden, here are some top tips that may help:

- Goldfinches will feed at bird tables, but seem to prefer hanging seed feeders containing sunflower hearts or nyjer seed.
- Keep feeding after the snow and ice has gone. April is an important time for Goldfinches, and at this time their natural food is hard to find.
- Provide a supply of fresh water, as seedeaters get very thirsty.
- Buy your food from a reputable source, this will ensure that the birds get the highest quality seed available.
- Use a specially designed nyjer seed feeder that suits Goldfinches slender beaks.
- Remember to keep your feeding station clean to prevent the spread of disease; ideally bird tables and the ground beneath should be swept clean daily to remove droppings and any uneaten food.
- Bird feed should be stored in a clean, dry and cool environment, this will minimise the risk of fungal or bacterial contamination.

For further information on how to attract Goldfinches, please send your name and address details to BTO, GBW, Room 65, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU, email gbw@bto.org or telephone 01842-750050.

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The BTO is the UK’s leading bird research organisation. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO’s surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 80 at its offices in Norfolk and Stirling, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO’s investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

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Notes for Editors

1. **Goldfinches** are widespread within Britain and Ireland but are most abundant in lowland areas, where favoured food plants are most numerous. Historically Goldfinches appear to have made use of natural foods in gardens at those times of the year when seed supplies were low. In more recent years Goldfinches have made increasing use of garden feeding stations, exploiting foods like sunflower hearts and nyjer seed. Alongside this change in feeding behaviour, there has been an increase in the peak Garden BirdWatch reporting rate from 23% to 55% of gardens over an eleven-year period.
2. **The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch** is the only nationwide survey of garden birds to run weekly throughout the year, providing important information on how birds use gardens, and how this use changes over time. Currently, some 16,500 people take part in the project. The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch is funded by participants' contributions and supported by CJ WildBird Foods Ltd and is the largest year round survey of garden birds anywhere in the world. The BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch survey has been fundamental in charting the increased use of gardens by Goldfinches. For more information see www.bto.org/gbw
3. **CJ WildBird Foods** is Europe's leading supplier of bird food and bird feeding products. CJ WildBird Foods has been responsible for a number of significant developments within the bird food and feeding industry, including the introduction of black sunflower seeds to the UK as a major new bird food and the development of specialist seed mixes for use in tubular feeders. The company has also been supporting research into the changing fortunes of garden bird populations, most notably through the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch.
4. **Bird Table Magazine** is published quarterly and sent free to all BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatchers. An annual subscription to the project costs just £12 and all new joiners will receive a free copy of the BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch Book (which normally retails for £9.99).
5. **Images** of garden birds are freely available for use in association with this press release. Please contact images@bto.org to request an electronic version. Please quote reference number 2006/11/65
6. **Bird Information.** For lots of facts and figures about garden birds go to www.bto.org/birdfacts
7. The BTO has an ISDN line available for radio interviews.

For further information please contact:

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